

Achieving the Perfect Wildlife Habitat

By *Elishia Ballentine*, Editor

Have Gun, Will Travel . . . many readers will remember the popular western of the '60s. However, it's not just a television show to Dr. Frank Jones, it's his life slogan!

From a young age, he hunted, just as most boys in Alabama. However, as an adult, Frank Jones has had the opportunity to travel all over the United States and Canada in pursuit of deer and, grand slam turkeys, and other wildlife. He's even made the long journey to South Africa on a couple safaris. Trophies of Eland (the largest antelope), Gemsbok (another antelope), and zebra adorn the walls of his hunting cabin. But if you ask Dr. Jones where he enjoys hunting most, he'll smile and tell you . . . right here at home on his Autauga County property. And his favorite prey? Quail . . . usually wild birds, but lately he has been experimenting with the pen-raised variety.

He not only hunts birds for his own personal pleasure, but for the past four years he has opened his quail preserve to friends during the months of October through March. Some of his guests travel from as far away as Arizona, California, and Montana just to hunt the birds in Alabama. They also enjoy staying in the re-modeled cabin (built in 1934 by his father, just before marrying his mother) with its privacy and the charming amenity that Dr. Jones has added . . . a wood-burning hot tub on the back porch!

That's how his 367-acre TREASURE Forest near Prattville turned into an ongoing project. A veterinarian for 35 years, in his spare time he is constantly

making improvements and enhancing the land for wildlife. When he moved back to the area in the mid 1970s, the family property was mostly pasture and crop-



Dr. Frank Jones is currently experimenting with improving quail habitat on his TREASURE Forest through use of native grasses such as the switch grass in which he is standing.

land. His father had farmed cotton, corn, and grains. Over time, Dr. Jones has converted it to plantation pine, with the oldest planted in 1985. There are both loblolly and longleaf of different ages.

To promote diversity, he uses a thin and burn program which creates different habitat for deer, turkey, and quail. The oldest pines have already been thinned twice, some have only been thinned once, and others are now ready to be thinned. Carefully placed openings also create edge for all wildlife.

In addition to the pines, Dr. Jones maintains pecan groves, several stands of sawtooth oak, and he has planted Chinese chestnut trees alongside all the roads. He also plants chufa for turkeys and clover for the deer.

One of the biggest challenges he faced on his property was a ravine covered with kudzu. Although it took several years and a lot of persistence, he finally eradicated it by first burning and then treating it with Roundup. He planted the area in hardwoods (predominantly sawtooth oaks) to both prevent erosion and provide for wildlife.

Not one to sit back and glory too much over his accomplishments, he moved on to tackle other goals for improving wildlife habitat. In the last few years, his pet project has been experimenting with different grasses for quail. He learned that grain sorghum did not work, but he did attain some success with alfalfa.

These days however, he is concentrating his efforts on native prairie grasses such as Alamo switch grass and Indiangrass. Both are drought-resistant and provide excellent cover.

He will quickly tell you that he is still learning, but so far, he is pleased with the results . . . and so are the birds. 🐦

Photo by Elishia Ballentine